S'Tyge's touch. He could at least command his own silence. But that was all he could command. His witless, illogical body would not be ruled. When S'Tyge's fingers clamped on his buttocks it started to fight, muscles straining against the unbreakable cable that bound him. Even knowing that his agitation increased the Romulan's stimulation, he struggled as the blunt head of the cock speared into the tight-clenched orifice, burning hot, steel hard. Pain split him as that implacable rod was thrust into him, but worse than the pain was the overload of drug-induced sensation. He could feel the obscene pressure in his gut, the pulse of alien blood inside him. He could anticipate the friction of movement against silk-thin and delicate tissues. Stiff pubic hair brushed against him and he felt the round weight of the Romulan's balls as he settled to the hilt in Spock's blood and pain.

"You shouldn't have shamed her, Spock--" Even Styge's breath against his excoriated back was agony. And then the withdrawal began, worse than the entry, sawing, filing, filling his mind with the image of a white hot sword drawn smoking from the wound. And with the pain S'Tyge's words, raping his mind, soiling it with their foulness which he could not escape....

An icy drench brought him back to agonized awareness. Water ran over and under him, dripped green from the table and stained the turf of the floor. It was his blood, but the action of the drug was over and the pain was less, so that he could relegate it once again to its proper function, warning that he was damaged and needed to heal. S'Tyge had gone, and the two guards watched him dress, as indifferent as they had been while S'Tyge raped him. When he could stand, fighting cramps and a weakness in his legs, they prodded him into motion. The web of fire tightened across his back, the memory of the sword went with him like a brand, but he had told them nothing; he had given the others time to act; he had not begged.

The Speaker and the Enterprise prisoners had been moved through the house into what was evidently Goren's bedchamber. The archway through which they entered was the only entrance to the room--a second having been blasted and blocked with rubble. The blind entrance to a bathroom had also been defaced with a blaster to eliminate privacy. The Romulan who took the position of guard was both alert and intelligent. When the Speaker staggered and clutched at T'serek for support the Romulan made no attempt to go to him. Dray caught the old man and supported him while Nadia turned back the covering on his bed. As they lowered him down he said, "A drink of water--" and when Dray turned away to get it, the dark eyes under the boney brows turned to Nadia. "Bend down," he whispered.

Her hands tightened on the covering, then she began to tuck it up around him, bending closer and blocking the guard's view.

"I have a weapon. I will wait two hours to see if they return your officer. If not, you must help me escape."

Nadia's hands stilled on the cover. Leave Spock?

"Move away so I can see him," commanded the guard.

Obediently, Nadia moved away. Comply with your captors, they were taught. Take the first opportunity to escape. She wished Kirk were there, full of decisive energy, but in that case the Romulans would have him now. She rejected the image. She didn't want to think about Spock in Romulan hands. She didn't want to be in charge. She slid to the turf next to Sunderson and leaned back against the hard wall. Goren's eyes didn't follow her. He drank the water T'serek brought and waved him away without speaking again.

She tried to think what Kirk would do, what Spock would want. But he had already shown them that by challenging the Romulan commander. They were there for a reason. The guard at the door was frowning at T'serek where he paced the room restlessly. Trying not to draw his attention, Nadia slipped her arm around Sunderson's waist. She leaned her head on the girl's shoulder as if she were tired and whispered, "We're going to escape as soon as Spock comes back. Pass it on." She settled into a comfortable position and held the girl still for a long count of a thousand, then started, as if she'd been falling asleep and sat up. She got up slowly and crossed the room, took T'serek's arm to hold him still and told him directly, almost soundlessly. "Goren has a weapon. He'll use it when Spock comes back."

"Do not speak to each other," commanded the guard.

"I have to use the facilities," Nadia said clearly. "I was telling him to stand with his back to the door." She saw Sundersun lean over and whisper in Clement's ear. "If you have any objections why don't you come in and discuss them? You might as well come, too, Beth." That covered the passing of the message to Tom Craven and gave the guard an argument he could win.

"One at a time," he said. "No more speaking, or I shoot that one."

Dray looked stubborn and planted himself in the doorway. While the guard glared back at him, Craven nudged Hillis and signed something unobtrusively with his right hand. It was the first time Nadia had realized the security men had other means of communication than speech. In the next hour she saw several exchanges and wondered what they were saying. She started to sweat when the second of Goren's hours began. It was clearly her duty to rescue the speaker and carry out the mission in spite of casualties. The Vulcan was neither a fool nor foolhardy. If he had courted torture--and a private session with the Romulans could not be anything else--he must have had a reason, and very likely it was this, to give them a chance to escape. If he did not return, or came back unconscious or too crippled to move, it would be her military responsibility to carry on, complete their task, and if she lived, report to James Kirk-- Oh, no. That was unthinkable.

When the guards did bring Spock and push him into the room, her relief was profound until she saw him go slowly to his knees. T'serek and Hillis were at his side in an instant to offer help, but when he spoke they stopped in their tracks.

"Don't--touch--me."

It was not his face, almost as white as salt, or the slow, dark blood staining his blue science tunic that stopped them. It was something in his voice that squeezed the heart and stung the eyes with tears.